

Spirit Bay Trading Co. in Duluth passes to second generation

By [Brooks Johnson](#) on Nov 20, 2016 at 9:00 p.m.



When Spirit Bay Trading Co. closed for a makeover last week, three generations of Smiths were there to see it happen: 67-year-old Terry Sr., his 48-year-old son Terry Jr. and his 15-year-old grandson, D.C.

Talk about a family business.

The Canal Park retailer has been passed on to the next generation, and the new owners have a lot of plans to reinvigorate the spirit of the store and grow its scope.

“We’ll still focus on beads, Native American art and crafts, but now we’re pushing a two-stores-in-one focus,” Terry Jr. said. “Locals are here Monday through Wednesday, tourists are in Thursday through Sunday. We want to cater to both.”

That means apparel, new jewelry and other kinds of gifts and decor will join the Native American art and bead supplies that have been at the store’s core since its inception 18 years ago.

“We still have to market the fact we’re the biggest bead provider in the area, if not in the state then definitely in the Northland,” Terry Jr. said.

Display cases were on the move last week as Terry Jr.’s wife, Suzi Smith, talked about the opportunities to bring in new products and build on what Terry Sr. started at Spirit Bay.

“We’re trying to get to know the business and get our fingerprints on it,” said Suzi, who is the creative director for the store. “We want everything we sell to have a story.”

The couple never thought they’d take the reins of “Papa’s store.” Living in the Twin Cities and working corporate jobs, it seemed too risky to pick up and take on a small business.

That changed last Thanksgiving during a visit to Duluth.

“One important thing for us as we are approaching middle age is we want to make a difference somehow,” Suzi said.

So when Terry Sr. offered Spirit Bay, it clicked, and the two bought a house here in July.

“I never thought I would do this until last year,” said Terry Jr., who is leaving a job as vice president of a coin distributor. “It was a big risk for us, it was scary, but what Dad’s done for the business, it’s already profitable. He’s built a nice brand and customer base.”

Terry Sr. started the business in 1998 in a small space on First Street. As he had a stockpile of art supplies, and friends who wanted them, he figured why not start a store.

“It was based mostly on need — what people ask me for,” he said. “And it was a venue to sell other people’s art.”

Spirit Bay moved to the Fitgers complex, then to two other locations in Canal Park before finding its current home at 395 S. Lake Ave.

When Terry Sr. retired as the Indian Education director with the Duluth school district, he found himself with less time than ever before.

“I decided to pass it down to family rather than close,” he said.

Terry Jr. says Spirit Bay’s impending challenges include implementing an online store and better catering to the disposable incomes of some customers.

“Canal Park is not a cheap place to stay, especially in the summer months,” he said.

Suzi was quick to get onboard the Duluth Winter Village coming the first weekend in December and wants to see the store branch out more on social media. Their son, D.C., already handles blogging for the store, and now it has Twitter and Instagram accounts and a more active Facebook presence as well.

Anything to get out there to provide for both the community and Spirit Bay, she said.

“We want to be that store where you hear: ‘If you go to Canal Park, you have to go to that store.’ ”